



Christianity
301: A *Living
the Way*
Guide





Christianity 301 is an exploration of what Christians believe—and have believed since the time of Jesus—about God, his world, and the life he has for us.

This workshop will guide participants to ...

- Understand and participate in the Church
- Engage lovingly and evangelistically with others
- Encounter God's plans for the future of the world

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Resources you will need ...

LTW Christianity 301 Guide
The Bible, any translation
startlivingtheway.com

Session One | A Place to Belong



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. What is something recent that is bringing you joy?
What is something recent that is causing you stress?

Then, discuss the following questions about your hopes for the coming weeks.

1. Do you have any previous experience with learning the basics of Christianity? If not, no problem, you've come to the right place!
2. How do you hope the following weeks with help you grow in your faith in Christ?

Session One | A Place to Belong

What is the Church?

The Church is a place where you can belong. It is *the* place you belong. God created it to be a space for relating, unifying, and healing. In fact, we can go even further. God established the Church to be His light and life on earth. It's His plan for transforming the world through the renewal of people's hearts. Here's the best part. You can join God and experience all of this at your church! In this session, we will explore together the meaning and purpose of the Church.

First thing's first. You'll notice in the previous paragraph that sometimes Church has a capital 'C' and other times a lower-case 'c'. You'll see this quite often. It's important. The capital C Church includes all followers of Jesus in all times and places. This is sometimes called the "invisible church." Here is a powerful passage where Jesus reveals the power of the Church invisible:

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."
(Matthew 16:18-19)

1. Jesus says the gates of Hell, i.e., all the evil in the world, will not overcome the Church. What do you think this means for us as we face so much suffering, pain, and darkness?

2. What do you think Jesus means when He says, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven?"

God sustains, transforms, and calls those who are part of His Church. That's why Hebrews 4:9 calls us "... the people of the God." We are His children. His sons and daughters. We are His flock of otherwise lost and helpless sheep. We are shepherded and protected by God Himself (John 10:11). The Bible uses several metaphors to explain what it means to be the very people of God.

First, it calls us the body of Jesus (Ephesians 1:22-23). We are interconnected with one another, and we carry Jesus' gospel into the world. **Second**, it calls us a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). We—the Church—are now the space where the presence of God dwells. God gives us life and builds us together. **Third**, we are called the family of God (Eph. 2:19). We are called to be that close to God and one another. We are family even when earthly families fail us.

We experience this when we join a local church that is part of God's Church!

1. How does it make you feel to call yourself a son or daughter of the King of all the universe?

2. Which of God's metaphors for the Church most resonates with you? Why?



Session One | A Place to Belong

Why the Church?

Jesus' reasons for building the Church are breathtaking. Astounding. World-altering. **First**, the Church embodies His presence for all to see. You and I and all people in the Church are meant to show a weary world what Jesus' healing power looks like. We are a portrait of His way of living. This means that when we care for one another, carry one other's burden, and build unity with one another, we show the world the presence of Jesus.

Second, the Church carries on the work that Jesus launched in His time on earth. Take a moment to let that sink in. When you and I are part of a church, we continue the very same work that Jesus began 2,000 years ago. We are called to tell people about the good news of redemption (Acts 1:8). To turn people to God through worship (Hebrews 10:25). To offer love, compassion, mercy, and justice to a world of immense need (Luke 10:25-27 and James 1:27). We are the hands and feet of Jesus, carrying on His words and deeds.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

That's quite a vision. Church won't always feel like this. It's full of imperfect people. Things happen that should not. People behave in ways they ought not. We need to mourn these failures and repent. Still, don't allow that to turn your gaze away from the tremendous good that God does through us, His Church. For centuries, we've been at the forefront of caring for the sick, bringing justice to the oppressed, and teaching life-giving words. Let's keep it up!

1. Have you experienced any hurts in a church? Have you healed from those?
2. Have you experienced the goodness of God through a church? What was that like?

Two Practices at Church

We are called to grow not just as individuals, but as a church. God's given us numerous practices to help with this—including friendship, hospitality, and service. You can cover all those (and more) at startlivingtheway.com. For now, let's cover two crucial practices that help to bring us together as God's people. These are **baptism** and **communion**.

Baptism is a public confession of your faith in Jesus. It symbolizes death to your old life and the beginning of your new life. While it is a symbol, and not the same thing as salvation, it is a watershed moment in your life—a declaration of faith in Jesus and commitment to the church.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3-5)



Session One | A Place to Belong

Likewise, **communion** is significant both individually and corporately. It began when Jesus gathered His students the night before He was crucified. They were there to remember a significant Jewish holiday, but this night was weightier than just that. Jesus gave them symbols to remember and share and internalize the sacrifice He was going to make for us.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28)

When we take communion, we remember what Jesus said and did. The bread and wine symbolize His broken body and shed blood. You take communion alone, but there's something special about partaking together. When we do, it unites us around the presence of Jesus and declares His love to the world.

1. Have you been baptized? If so, what did that moment mean to you? If not, are you interested in doing so?

2. Describe your experience of taking communion. What thoughts and emotions arise as you do? What affect does it have on you?

Exercises for Session Two

1. Between now and your next meeting, make some notes about your church. The best way to do this is when you are engaged, e.g., on Sunday, a small group, or a service project. What does it do to bring people together? To build unity? To love and serve others? Discuss your observations next time you meet.

2. Complete the discussion questions for session two. Come ready to discuss!

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:28)



Session Two | Loving Others Well



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. Is there anything causing you anxiety, worry, or fear in the past weeks? Pray for one another about these things.

1. How was your experience with the practice of confession?
2. Do you have any concerns you'd like to share about confession?

Session Two | Loving Others Well

What is Love?

Jesus embodies the most compelling example of love the world has ever seen. For Him, love is not just a feeling we get. It's a commitment to seek what's good for those we love. Let's say that again. Jesus shows us that real love seeks what's good for the beloved. If we manipulate someone, even family and friends, we aren't loving them. Same goes for lying, stealing, and betrayal. Those things just aren't consistent with love. Here's how the Bible explains it:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

Jesus loves people like this. He offers love both by what He says and what He does. When Jesus shares the gospel, He often pairs it with loving deeds. For instance:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. (Matthew 4:23-25)

Likewise, we are called to offer this same kind of love to others. We are imperfect, to be sure, and we won't always get it right. Remember, though, we have the Holy Spirit, and we show His love when we love others well. He's there to love us and help us.

Jesus loves us and help us to love others well.

1. Review the above Bible passages. How would you summarize or define love in your own words?
2. Why do you think Jesus pairs loving words with loving deeds? What can we learn from this?
3. Think of a time someone showed you the love of Jesus. What impact did that have on you?

We want to love like Jesus. It's good for us when we do so. It's good for others. It's good for our witness to the reality of God's Kingdom. Let's explore some concrete ways we can love others well. Remember, these are practices we engage in as individuals but it's best, and most effective, when we pursue them together as a church.



Session Two | Loving Others Well

Intercede in Prayer

Prayer is not merely a supplement to loving others. It's at the very heart of it. We love others well when we bring them and their needs to God in prayer. Keep it simple. Ask God to be with those who hurt, suffer, or grieve. Ask Him to give them the comfort and wisdom they need. As you pray, consider even imagining them wraps in the arms of God, receiving healing from Him.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (Ephesians 4:18)

Offer Hospitality

The Bible envisions hospitality as more than simply sharing a meal (although that's a great start!). It is welcoming guests and strangers into our homes and our lives. It is providing a safe place where they be open about their struggles, failures, and needs. Hospitality is about loving even when it's hard to do so. In fact, it's both a practice—inviting people into our homes—and a way of living our lives. Lovingly. Welcoming. Hospitably.

For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (Matthew 25:42-45)

Show Compassion

Compassion means, quite literally, to suffer with, together, or alongside. In other words, when we have compassion, we first recognize the struggles of another. We are attentive and intentional enough to notice. Then, we do something about it. This something might be anything from advocacy to providing a meal to sitting quietly and crying together. Be intentional about watching the people in your life. You'll discover they need this one, big time.

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. (Romans 12:15) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Seek Justice

Justice begins with the character of the Just One. God Justice is at the heart of who He is. We learn in the Bible that He cares deeply for orphans, widows, and the oppressed. He moves dramatically on their behalf. God desires freedom and restitution for victims of any kinds of violence and oppression. Justice is a part of God's mission, and He calls us to join Him. We do so when we advocate and stand with victims of abuse and violence, whether they suffer injustice because of the color of their skin or their stage of biological development.

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:17-18)



Session Two | Loving Others Well

This is not a comprehensive list of how we can love others, of course. But it does include some of the major ways Jesus calls us to join Him in His mission to a weary world. Loving others isn't just about sacrifice either. We receive exponentially more reward when we do sacrifice than when we merely seek our own interests.

1. Which of these practices have you experienced as the recipient? How were you loved well?
2. Which of these practices most strikes a chord with you? How, specifically, would you like to grow in this area of loving others well?
3. What kind of sacrifices do you think it takes to love others well?

Exercises for Session Three

Congratulations, you have completed some difficult but rewarding material! Make sure to keep the relationship central to this experience. Call, text, and email regular encouragements. It's a crazy world. We need one another.

1. Make some time to talk to God about the practices of loving others well. Tell Him what's on your heart and let Him speak to you. You'll soon begin to see more and more opportunities to put them into practice. Count on it.
2. Complete the discussion questions for session three. Come ready to discuss!



Session Three | **Leading Others to the Way**



Begin by catching up on one another's lives How have you spent your free time over the past weeks? What words would you use to describe it (e.g., rejuvenating, refreshing, wasteful, fretting)?

1. Describe your experience meditating on either John 19:1-42 or John 20:1-29. What did you learn by interacting with Scripture slowly and intentionally?
2. How was your experience of session two different from session one? Do you have any remaining questions before we jump into session three?

Session Three | **Leading Others to the Way**

A Call from Jesus

Jesus invites us to go on mission with Him. In fact, it's part of what it means to follow Him. We love and seek the things that Jesus loves and seeks. More than anything else, He cares for *people*, just like you and me. No one who cries out to Him in weariness is left in the cold. That's Jesus' point in this illustration:

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' (Luke 15:3-6)

That's how much Jesus loved and sought you before you knew Him. It's how much He loves and seeks those who are still lost. Some people think of God as a powerful but disinterested spirit in the clouds. The Bible will have none of it. God sees, hears, and desires the best for us.

How does it make you feel to know God loved and sought you like the lost sheep?

There's more great news. God calls us to be part of His mission to love and seek the sheep who have wandered away. That's quite an honor. No one who walks with Jesus lacks a serious mission in life. What higher calling could there be? We walk with Jesus, receive His power, and call people who are lost to come home. Here's how Jesus describes it:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt. 28:18-20)

Let's break that down. Jesus gives us the authority we need. We don't have it on our own. The pressure is off. You don't need to find just the right words at just the right time in just the right place. All you need is Jesus. He's the one doing the work in people's hearts. Not you. Again, the pressure is off. You're on mission with *Him* and in *His* power. It's a privilege, not a pressure.

Look at the passage again. He promises to be with us **always**. So, walk with Him. He will help you. You'll have everything you need.

Furthermore, Jesus calls lost people to become His disciples. Recall that a *disciple* is a student or apprentice. A disciple learns how to live his or her life like Jesus would. We aren't called simply to make converts—people who affirm in their minds that Christianity is true. We are called to make people who desire, above everything else, to know and live like Jesus.

1. What do you think it means, practically, to have the authority that Jesus gives to us?

2. Where do you think God is calling you to make disciples? At home? Work? Church?



Session Three | **Leading Others to the Way**

Gospelling in Word and Deed

Jesus' early followers called this adventure *gospelling*. To gospel meant to tell the good news about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Their word for gospel was *euangelion*, from which we get our word 'evangelism.' You'll hear people use this big word often. Don't forget that evangelizing means, literally, *gospelling*. Telling the good news about Jesus. So, how did Jesus' early followers do this? Let's take a look:

As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. (Matthew 10:7-8)

Jesus tells His students to follow a pattern, one that characterized His own ministry. *Gospelling* should include both *word* and *deed*. That is, they were called to tell people the good news and to demonstrate it by what they did. Saying aloud, "Your sins can be forgiven," and showing compassion by caring for the sick are both ways of *gospelling*. They both tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The implications for our lives are extraordinary. It means that when we speak the truth, we witness to the truth that is Jesus. When we speak words of love, we witness to the love God showers on all people. When we speak life-giving words, we witness to the God who plants us by streams of living water.

When we offer forgiveness, we witness to the forgiveness we have been given. When we practice patience, we witness to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. When we seek justice, we witness to the just character of God. When we show mercy, we witness to the mercy we have been given. The list goes on. It is good. It is life. It is endless.

1. Read John 4:1-26, 39-41. What do you learn about evangelism from Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well?

2. Read Acts 8:26-39. What do you learn about evangelism from Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian?

3. Are there any words or deeds God is calling you to offer on His behalf this coming week?

4. It's OK if the idea of witnessing makes you a bit anxious. Share any apprehensions you have with one another. Pray together about these.



Session Three | **Leading Others to the Way**

Here, There, and Everywhere

Jesus calls lost sheep. He loves and cares for them. He wants them to experience real life. That's what He did for us and what He longs to do for others. God calls us to go and do the same. We are privileged to walk with Jesus and share the good news. In word. In deed.

But, where? To whom? Good questions. Just before leaving earth, Jesus gave an answer. We are called to gospel everywhere and to everyone. We are His representatives from the moment we rise to the moment we sleep. But there's a pattern to it. Gospelling begins with those nearest to you, in the spaces you inhabit every day. Jesus says:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Jerusalem represents home. It's the streets you walk, the shops you visit, your workplace, your home, your church. That's where you begin gospelling. People are lost. They need love. Forgiveness. Hope. You don't have to look far. It's time to show the world the incomparable Jesus Christ. Here, there, and everywhere.

Exercises for Session Four

Congratulations, you have completed some difficult but rewarding material! Make sure to keep the relationship central to this experience. Call, text, and email regular encouragements. It's a crazy world. We need one another.

1. Make a list of the three most important places in your life. What would it look like for you to begin gospelling there? Come ready to discuss your thoughts.
2. Complete the discussion questions for session four. Come ready to discuss!

Prayer is crucial in evangelism: Only God can change the heart of someone who is in rebellion against Him. No matter how logical our arguments or how fervent our appeals, our words will accomplish nothing unless God's Spirit prepares the way. (Billy Graham)



Session Four | Where It's All Going



Begin by catching up on one another's lives (if meeting as a group). How often have you been jealous, critical, or irritable towards others these past weeks? Reflect on the reasons for this and pray for one another.

1. Discuss your time reflecting on God's character. What did you learn? How did it affect you?
2. What aspects of God's character do you find the most comforting?

Session Four | Where It's All Going

This world is headed somewhere. History isn't just one pointless thing after another. It isn't aimless. There's a destination. There's a goal towards which we are heading. Things won't go on like this forever. They will one day be made new. That's the hope followers of Jesus have for the future and for here and now. In this session, we will learn more about God's good, beautiful, and true plans for us.

No one knows exactly when these things will happen. Jesus makes that much clear (see Matthew 24:36). There is much we do know, however, because God told us ahead of time. Some of this may seem wild but remember that it's all good because God's the one in charge.

Here's What We Know

Evil is real. It manifests itself as violence, injustice, and loss. God wants us to brace ourselves, because it's going to get worse. The greed, selfishness, lies, manipulation, and abuse will only increase. This isn't some punishment from God. It's what we collectively have wanted since the beginning. We've desired to be our own masters and go our own way. Remember how bad things were before the Noah built the ark? Here's Genesis 6:5:

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. (Gen. 6:5)

That's how Jesus says things will be before the end comes. Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart will be only evil all the time. That's pretty intense. Even frightening. But there's good news. God's still in charge. The evil in this world will not win. It will be toppled by the power of God. We learn this in Revelation, a book that tells us a lot about the end. It says:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." (Revelation 18:2-3)

Babylon, in this passage, is a metaphor for the evil in the world. The kingdom of greed, selfishness, lies, manipulation, and abuse will fall. Evil will increase, yes, but then God will obliterate it. We know this is part of His plan. God told us in advance. "Take heart," Jesus says, "I have overcome the world (John 16:33)." He means it literally. Take heart. Have hope. This world can be a bleak place. But Babylon will fall.

1. How are you doing with all this? Is it hopeful? Frightening? Depressing? Why?

2. Do you see evil increasing in our world? How specifically? What do you think God calls us to do in the face of it?



Session Four | Where It's All Going

Evil will increase but will then be obliterated. You can take that to the bank. Let's keep going. God has told us even more. Not only will He end evil; He will also remake the world into what it was always meant to be. Catch this. The world will be brand new. We will get to dwell in it. Forever. Pure joy. Pure love. Pure adventure.

Think of the moments in life that are so good—the sunsets, warm embraces, joyful smiles—that you struggle (in vain) to hold onto them. Well, as unbelievable as this may sound, one day you'll be able to. Or, rather, you won't need to. Moments like these will be eternally present to you. Don't take my word for it. Check it out:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:1-5)

Oh, by the way. This newness includes your mind, body, and spirit. God will raise you up and make you new—the person you were always meant to be. Sound too good to be true? It's not. It's where history is going. It's what God is doing. He's going to make heaven real for us by remaking our world. In that day, all people will know that He is God.

1. What three words describe your response to Revelation 21:1-5. Why did you choose these?

2. What do you most look forward to when God makes this place called heaven for us?

Evil will increase. God will obliterate it. He will make all things new. Then we will enjoy it with Him forever. That's what we know. What, if anything, does this mean for us now, in this life? Does it have any bearing on how we live today, tomorrow, and the rest of our lives?

Why It Matters Now

Jesus came preaching the good news of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is God's good, beautiful, and true will for our lives and world. When we walk with Jesus, we enter the Kingdom and live there. It's where restoration happens. It's where things are remade into what they were intended to be. Hearts are healed. Relationships are restored. The oppressed are vindicated. That's the Kingdom Jesus came to establish. He says it like this:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)



Session Four | Where It's All Going

Does any of this sound familiar? It should. It's a taste of what God will do one day (see Revelation 21:1-5) that we get to experience now. The future has invaded the present in Jesus. His resurrection shows us that death, pain, and suffering are not the end of the story. God will give sight to the blind. He will set the oppressed free. Bodies will not stay in the ground because Jesus is alive. God's work is not yet complete, of course, but we get to experience the beginning of His restoration now.

That's the meaning of redemption and justice and mercy and compassion and reconciliation. Each is a dimension of God's future Kingdom that is available today because of Jesus. When we seek these, we encounter the glorious hope described in Revelation 21:1-5. That's how important God's future is to us now.

1. Where do you see God's future restoration happening around you now?
2. How do you think you can be part of God's restorative work here and now?

Reflections on Christianity 301

1. What is a highlight or something especially meaningful you learned in this guide?
2. What is something that especially challenged you as you learn to walk with Jesus?
3. How do you plan to celebrate the good things God has done over these past weeks?

When you get off the plane in a new time zone, you adjust your watch to the right time in the new location. One of the most striking things Jesus's first followers did was to adjust their watches to this belief that God's ultimate future had arrived in the present. (N.T. Wright)

